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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
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UNHCR EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In the period since the October 1993 session of the Executive Committee, UNHCR's evaluation activities have concentrated on operations and issues which are of particular concern to the High Commissioner and her senior management team.

2. In addition to a major review of UNHCR operations in former Yugoslavia, the Central Evaluation Section has completed a number of studies relating to voluntary repatriation and other durable solutions. These include evaluations of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) process in Central America, the encashment programme for Afghan refugees in Pakistan, and the 'returnee aid and development' approach to post-repatriation assistance. Studies of UNHCR's resettlement policy and practice and the 'cross-mandate' approach to durable solutions in Ethiopia have also been initiated. In addition, the Evaluation Section has completed reviews of UNHCR's involvement with two major beneficiary groups: refugee women and internally displaced people.

3. Since the 1993 meeting of the Executive Committee, new procedures have been introduced to ensure that the conclusions and recommendations presented in evaluation reports are effectively communicated to and acted upon by decision-makers within the organization.

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4. On the basis of a recommendation from the Evaluation Committee, which comprises the Deputy High Commissioner, the Director of International Protection, the Director of Programmes and Operational Support, and the Controller, each evaluation report is now presented to the Senior Management Committee by the Chief of the Evaluation Section. A specific member of the Committee is then requested to assume responsibility for coordinating appropriate follow-up activities and reporting on action taken.

II. COMPLETED REVIEWS

A. UNHCR operations in former Yugoslavia

5. In order to learn lessons from UNHCR's operation in former Yugoslavia, the Evaluation Section was requested by the High Commissioner to examine the organization's efforts to protect and assist populations affected by the war. The review was also intended to identify ways in which UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response capacity could be further reinforced.

6. The evaluation concluded that UNHCR's relief operations have played a critical role in alleviating suffering in former Yugoslavia. Moreover, in some instances, the presence of UNHCR and other international bodies has placed obstacles in the path of violence, discouraging 'ethnic cleansing' and the harassment of minorities.

7. The evaluation observed that none of UNHCR's traditional durable solutions were appropriate to the problem of mass displacement within and from former Yugoslavia. The organization's primary aim was therefore to save lives until a political settlement could be achieved. This objective was not easy to attain, however, as mass population displacements were a direct objective, and not just a consequence, of the conflict.

8. The review concluded that the political analysis carried out by senior UNHCR staff was generally excellent, enabling the organization to keep pace with and anticipate developments. UNHCR's relations with the media were also managed more successfully than in any recent large-scale operation.

9. UNHCR's protection efforts in Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were reasonably effective, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were specific situations where UNHCR's presence helped to bring a degree of security to threatened populations. More generally, however, UNHCR's efforts to protect the war-affected population and to prevent further displacements were modest in their impact.

10. UNHCR's logistics operation in former Yugoslavia succeeded in delivering massive quantities of assistance. One of the principal lessons learnt from this experience is the enormous potential which exists to mount an international relief operation under a UNHCR banner when governmental and public interest has been mobilized.

11. The review concluded that, when assembling a relief operation from a variety of disparate resources, a substantial management effort must also be made to ensure that internal programme capacity matches external logistical inputs. Otherwise, UNHCR may find itself simply shifting gross tonnages of relief as quickly as possible, in an uncontrolled and imbalanced manner.

12. The operation in former Yugoslavia demonstrated that the long-term blueprints traditionally associated with the notion of planning are of limited value in the management of an emergency operation. The review also suggested that a number of UNHCR's systems and procedures should be modified to make them more appropriate to the organization's needs in fast-paced emergencies.

13. UNHCR's experience over the past three years has in many ways demonstrated the validity of the "lead agency approach" to coordination. However, this experience has also revealed a need for UNHCR to give greater attention to the operational implications of the lead agency concept. In particular, UNHCR must identify the activities and arrangements which are required for a lead agency to solicit the involvement and collaboration of other United Nations agencies, the ICRC and non-governmental organizations in large-scale relief operations.

14. The evaluation concluded that in future, it would be desirable for the humanitarian and military aspects of a large-scale United Nations operation to be better coordinated. In too many instances, these different elements of the operation suffered from the absence of clearly defined roles and responsibilities, coupled with the lack of an overall coordinating framework.

15. By using staff secondments and a recently expanded roster in former Yugoslavia, UNHCR was able to deploy personnel more rapidly and in larger numbers than in any recent emergency. However, difficulties in identifying a sufficient number of mid-level internal staff hindered the organization's ability to provide the programme with the management structure required.

16. As the importance of UNHCR's role grew in former Yugoslavia, the conditions in which the organization was obliged to work became increasingly difficult. While efforts were made to improve the safety of staff, UNHCR's lack of experience in such situations meant that security provisions were never fully developed to the extent required. Experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrates that UNHCR must define more precisely the security conditions in which it is prepared to ask staff to work.

17. The evaluation concluded that the operation in former Yugoslavia has acted as an important catalyst in the international community's evolving approach to humanitarian protection and assistance. Many observers believe that UNHCR's activities in former Yugoslavia have set the stage for the organization to assume a greater involvement with non-refugee populations.

18. The various lessons and operational recommendations made by the evaluation are now scheduled to be presented to UNHCR's Senior Management Committee. The committee will then determine the follow-up action which is needed to further reinforce UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response capacity, and to adapt the organization to the operational challenges encountered in situations of internal conflict and displacement.

B. The CIREFCA process

19. The International Conference on Central American Refugees is widely regarded as one of the international community's most successful efforts to formulate a comprehensive approach to the problem of mass displacement. A review of this process was completed in the second quarter of 1994, focusing on three principal issues: CIREFCA's role as a model for regional durable solutions; the institutional relationship between UNHCR and UNDP within the CIREFCA framework; and the impact of the CIREFCA process at the political and project levels.

20. The evaluation concluded that CIREFCA had reinforced the peace process in Central America by encouraging Governments and other members of the international community to adopt an integrated approach to the problems of mass displacement, relief, reconciliation and rehabilitation. The success of this process, the review concluded, was built upon a number of foundations: the political will of the Central American Governments to find durable solutions to the plight of the uprooted; the commitment of UNHCR and UNDP to work collaboratively towards that goal; and the willingness of donor states to support CIREFCA in a tangible manner.

21. With regard to inter-agency cooperation, the review concluded that the CIREFCA process had highlighted a number of the differences between UNHCR and UNDP, and had in some cases led to strained relations between the two agencies. Nevertheless, coordination had improved in the course of the CIREFCA process. The Joint Support Unit established in Costa Rica had functioned in a particularly effective manner, and provided a concrete example of inter-agency cooperation which could act as a model in other parts of the world.

22. With regard to relief and rehabilitation programmes, the accomplishments of the process were less evident. CIREFCA had only partial success in reinforcing local capacity and in establishing projects that were consistent with sustainable development. While returnee populations benefited considerably from activities undertaken within the CIREFCA framework, internally and externally displaced people did not receive the same degree of attention. At the same time, insufficient efforts were made to establish the mechanisms required to track funding and monitor projects, a shortcoming which hindered coordination and prevented effective evaluation of the CIREFCA process.

23. The Evaluation Section's study of the CIREFCA process, which benefited from the close cooperation of UNDP, has been shared with staff in Central America, who will seek to incorporate the report's recommendations into ongoing operations in the region. A summary of the report was also made available to Governments, NGOs and other participants at the CIREFCA closing event, which was held in Mexico City at the end of June 1994.

C. The encashment programme in Pakistan

24. In the past four years, between a third and a half of the three million Afghans in Pakistan have participated in UNHCR's encashment programme, an initiative which provides refugees with the opportunity to exchange their ration cards for a one-time repatriation grant consisting of cash and food. In the second half of 1993, the Evaluation Section undertook a review of this programme, in order

to assess its impact and to determine its relevance to refugee situations in other parts of the world.

25. The review concluded that in Pakistan, the encashment system had proven to be an effective and efficient means of facilitating large-scale repatriation and de-registration. The administrative costs and staffing requirements of the initiative have been minimal, and yet very few operational difficulties have been encountered in the implementation of the programme. Encashment has not only provided an unusually direct means of transferring donor state contributions to UNHCR beneficiaries, but has also enabled the organization to support the refugees' own choices and repatriation strategies.

26. At the same time, the review concluded that the encashment programme has been characterized by two principal limitations. On the one hand, the programme has not been able to assist in the return of several important refugee groups: those who have become economically and socially integrated in Pakistan; those who originate from parts of Afghanistan which are affected by political or ethnic conflict; and those who are too vulnerable to repatriate in a spontaneous manner. On the other hand, a considerable number of the Afghan refugees who are unable or unwilling to return have cashed their ration cards prematurely, and are now obliged to remain in Pakistan without access to assistance.

27. The evaluation concluded that in order to maximize their effectiveness, encashment programmes should be formulated and implemented within the framework of a comprehensive durable solutions strategy, involving both the country of origin and the country of asylum. Particular emphasis was placed on the need for accurate registration systems, on the coordination of repatriation and rehabilitation activities, and on the provision of assistance and organized transport arrangements for refugees who do not wish to return to a conflict-affected country in a spontaneous manner.

28. UNHCR staff involved in all current and anticipated repatriation programmes have had the opportunity to review this report and to consider the relevance of the encashment system to their ongoing activities. The findings of the review have also been incorporated into the Training Section's materials on voluntary repatriation, including a video film which examines the lessons learnt from UNHCR's experience in Pakistan.

D. Returnee aid and development

29. Over the past two years, the Evaluation Section has completed reviews of several important repatriation and reintegration programmes, and has contributed to the development of UNHCR's policy and methodological framework for Quick Impact Projects. In the context of these initiatives, the Section completed a study which examined the origins, principles and potential of the 'returnee aid and development' approach to post-repatriation assistance.

30. The review concluded that a number of obstacles stand in the way of this approach, most notably the absence of peace and the level of destruction in many areas of actual and potential return, coupled with the reluctance of both host and donor governments to prioritize such areas for reconstruction and development activities. In addition, the study underlined the necessarily limited and

short-term contribution which UNHCR can make to the rehabilitation of returnee-affected areas.

31. Examining the issue of institutional responsibility in more detail, the review argued that the returnee aid and development approach has given inadequate attention to the role of indigenous structures and organizations. Rather than seeking to 'hand over' programmes and projects to other international agencies, UNHCR's ultimate aim in countries of origin must be to assist in the development of local capacities and competence. To facilitate this task, the study concluded, repatriation planning should focus less on the logistics of return from countries of asylum, and much more on conditions, needs and resources in the country of origin.

32. This review is to be presented for discussion at the Senior Management Committee. The study will also be made available to all UNHCR offices which are involved in the planning and implementation of repatriation and reintegration programmes, in conjunction with the Policy and Methodological Framework for Quick Impact Projects, prepared by the Senior Coordinator for Reintegration Assistance.

E. UNHCR's involvement with internally displaced people

33. In the second half of 1993, the Evaluation Section completed a discussion paper which identified some of the key issues arising from UNHCR's actual and potential involvement with internally displaced people. The principal purpose of this initiative was to provide an analytical framework for a more detailed examination of UNHCR's experience with the internally displaced in specific field locations.

34. The paper observed that UNHCR had made a number of recent efforts to specify the circumstances under which it would extend its activities to the internally displaced. These initiatives have lent a new degree of coherence to an important policy issue which has traditionally been handled on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, the study suggested, the flexible nature of UNHCR's new criteria for involvement has meant that the scale, scope and duration of the organization's role in situations of internal displacement remains to be fully determined.

35. The discussion paper noted that, in view of UNHCR's long experience in providing protection and assistance to refugee populations, it is understandable that many observers should regard the High Commissioner's Office as the natural agency to take responsibility for the internally displaced. The study warned that it would be premature for UNHCR to reach the same conclusion without first addressing a number of fundamental questions about the needs of internally displaced people and the organization's capacity to meet them.

36. This study was presented to an ad hoc internal working group on the internally displaced and to the Senior Management Committee. As a result of these consultations, the Division of International Protection was requested to undertake a follow-up study, which sought to draw some general conclusions from UNHCR's operational experience with internally displaced people in 20 different countries. The contents of these studies are reflected in two recent documents submitted to the Executive Committee: 'Financial and Programmatic Implications of

UNHCR Activities on Behalf of the Internally Displaced' (EC/1994/SC.2/CRP.13), and 'Protection Aspects of UNHCR Activities on Behalf of Internally Displaced Persons' (EC/1994/SCP/CRP.2).

F. UNHCR's policy on refugee women

37. In the second half of 1993, the Evaluation Section concluded a review of the implementation and impact of UNHCR's policy on refugee women, the principal findings of which were presented to the October 1993 session of the Executive Committee (EC/1993/SC.2/CRP.27). The conclusions and recommendations of that review were subsequently incorporated into the proceedings and documentation of the Working Group on Refugee Women and Children (EC/1994/SCP/CRP.5).

38. At the request of the Director of Programmes and Operational Support, the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women has assumed responsibility for overseeing the follow-up process and preparing regular status reports with regard to this initiative. Many of the 45 recommendations presented in the evaluation have now been fully or partially implemented, while those relating to the recruitment and representation of female staff have, at the request of the Executive Committee, been presented to the Sub-Committee on Administration and Finance in a 'Note on Human Resources Management' (EC/1994/SC.2/CRP.20).

III. WORK IN PROGRESS

39. The Evaluation Section, in collaboration with the Division of International Protection, has initiated a global review of UNHCR resettlement policy and practice. The evaluation is intended to reassess the role of resettlement as a durable solution and instrument of refugee protection. In addition, the review will provide an examination of current resettlement procedures and make recommendations with regard to the management and organization of resettlement activities within UNHCR. The conclusions of the review are expected to be discussed at a meeting of representatives from principal resettlement countries in the last quarter of 1994.

40. Drawing upon UNHCR's extensive experience in the provision of relief assistance, the Evaluation Section is currently working with the Division of Programmes and Operational Support and the Training Section to prepare a set of guidelines on the distribution and monitoring of food and other commodities. A Steering Committee has been established to oversee this initiative, the first stage of which will be completed in the third quarter of 1994. After a period of field testing, the final version of the guidelines should be ready for distribution to UNHCR staff and operational partners in early 1995.

41. The Evaluation Section is currently undertaking reviews of programmes in two countries where UNHCR is engaged in innovative activities. In Ethiopia, the Section is completing an analysis of the cross-mandate approach to refugee and returnee assistance. In Tajikistan, the Section's review will focus on issues such as UNHCR's role with regard to returning refugees, internally displaced people and the prevention of population displacements. Both studies will be completed in the third quarter of 1994.